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ABSTRACT

Research has indicated that the elderly retain the ability to learn, and specifically to learn new languages. Furthermore, the increasingly greater proportion of old people in the population demands that their need for continued intellectual stimulation be met. In the absence of explicit motives for learning an ethnic language, Esperanto is a good choice for second language study among old people. It is a language of great regularity in which communicative competence can be achieved quickly and with little frustration. In addition, the international community of Esperanto speakers is already characterized by its ability to organize into associations that serve the interests and needs of members. In introducing the elderly to Esperanto, their special learning needs, both cognitive and affective, must be considered in course organization, textbook selection, and teaching methods. (JB)

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ESPERANTO AND OLDER PEOPLE

by Ilona Gál

PREFACE

In late July and early August 1978, some 4,400 people assembled in Varna, Bulgaria, for a conference. Although they came from over fifty countries and probably had almost as many native languages, they made no use of interpreters or translators.

These people spoke the international language Esperanto, and the conference they were attending was the World Esperanto Congress. Esperanto has a relatively long history. The first textbook in the language was published in 1887 by an oculist from Poland named Ludovic Zamenhof. Zamenhof set out the bare bones of a language – a thousand word-roots or so, and sixteen basic rules. But out of these small beginnings there grew a complete language, with its own literature, its own traditions and its own rather special history. Today there are many thousands of Esperanto speakers in all parts of the world.

The topic of the Congress in Bulgaria was international education. Many participants pointed out (using Esperanto to do so), that the language is associated with no particular nation, that it is an ideal second language for all. They showed how it serves as an effective repository and communicator of the international values which are common to all humanity and with which much of education for international understanding is concerned. They

emphasized that it is an easy language, and hence a very suitable first foreign language for schools. Currently some 16,000 or 17,000 children learn Esperanto in schools each year, and that number appears to be increasing.

For many of the participants the Congress was an occasion for the renewal of old friendships. For others it brought new ones. Many had attended the previous year's congress in Reykjavik or the one before that in Athens. Others had been at the congress in Tokyo or the one in Portland, Oregon. Some of the older people at the congress remembered other gatherings twenty, thirty or forty years ago. Many met correspondents for the first time. Others planned new meetings at the many smaller Esperanto conferences which fill each year's calendar to overflowing, or discussed visits to one another's countries and particularly to local Esperanto groups.

The discussion of international education was by no means superficial. Ninety years of use has given Esperanto a fine flexibility and expressiveness, and the pooling of the experience of fifty nationalities brought surprising disagreements along with a fair measure of unanimity. When the participants were not discussing the congress topic, they were visiting meetings of professional groups, or attending lectures, or watching plays, or listening to concerts. The annual congress is more than a conference. For a speech community whose members are scattered over the entire globe it is the year's major cultural event, a vital meeting-place and testing-place for the language.

I have dwelt at length on the World Congress because it is events such as this that inspired Dr. Gál's profound yet simple thesis. She argues in this study that older people are becoming an ever larger part of the population, they have the leisure and (increasingly) the stamina to travel abroad, but they often lack the linguistic knowledge. They might learn an ethnic language, but ethnic languages are difficult to master, and older people experience special problems in language learning, many of them sociocultural rather than physical.

But Esperanto, argues Dr. Gál, is easier than the ethnic languages. It puts us in contact not with one country, but with the world. And there exists a strong Esperanto movement, which provides a ready intellectual home for the older person and which breaks down barriers of loneliness. The international character of this movement can open new horizons for older people, offer them a chance to make a contribution to international understanding, and increase their sense of self-esteem. It is a compelling and important argument, not just for Esperanto speakers (for whom the study was originally written), but for gerontologists, psychologists and all who are interested in the social integration of our older citizens.

Humphrey Tonkin

A. INTRODUCTION

Recent years have seen a steady rise in the number of senior citizens. This increase is one of the most significant phenomena of the present day. To understand the phenomenon more clearly, let us first look at a set of statistics compiled by the World Health Organization — an age distribution in most areas of the world in 1960, with projected figures for the year 2000 (Table 1).

TABLE 1

Age Distribution (%) in Most Areas of the World in 1960 and in 2000

[See Hun, p. 17]

AREA	AGE 0-14		AGE 15-64		AGE 65 AND OVER	
	1960	2000	1960	2000	1960	2000
The whole world	36.4%	32.4%	58.7%	61.2%	4.9%	6.4%
Developed areas	28.7%	25.6%	63.0%	63.0%	8.3%	11.4%
Developing areas	40.1%	34.6%	56.6%	60.6%	3.3%	4.8%
East Asia	36.1%	26.5%	59.7%	66.1%	4.2%	7.4%
South Asia	41.0%	34.6%	55.9%	60.9%	3.1%	4.6%
Europe	25.7%	22.9%	64.5%	64.0%	9.8%	13.1%
Soviet Union	30.8%	27.1%	63.0%	61.7%	6.2%	11.2%
Africa	43.1%	42.3%	54.2%	57.7%	2.7%	3.2%
North America	31.3%	29.8%	59.7%	61.3%	9.0%	8.9%
South America	41.7%	38.0%	55.0%	57.7%	3.3%	4.3%
Oceania	31.7%	31.6%	60.5%	59.9%	7.8%	8.5%

The predicted increase in the average is striking, especially in industrially prosperous areas. More than 1,000,000,000 people live in such regions today — in modern, prosperous conditions. In these places, scientific and technological evolution has tremendously accelerated industrialization and urbanization and raised the standard of living, making the achievements of medical science accessible to virtually all inhabitants. Naturally, the percentages of senior citizens vary and will continue to vary significantly when individual countries are compared. For instance, it is predicted that in 1980 people over 60 will constitute 25 % of the population of England, 18.9% in the Federal Republic of Germany, 18.6% in Belgium, 17.1 % in France, 16.1 % in Italy, and 13.6 % in Spain. At present the highest mean age occurs in the Netherlands, Switzerland, the German Democratic Republic and Scandinavia. In the

developing countries, where more than 2.6 thousand million people live, hygiene has begun to improve perceptibly, resulting in higher birth rates and decreasing death rates. This means that the percentage of senior citizens is also going up in these countries. In India, for example, the mean age in 1957 was only 32, while by 1968 it had risen to 51.

Forecasts say that at the end of our millennium there will be about 600 million people over the age of 60. Their present number is approximately 200 million. In 1980, the over-sixty group will make up about one fifth of the population of Europe. In Hungary, they reached 18.6% of the population in 1975, and in the near future every fourth inhabitant of Budapest will belong to the over-sixty age group.

A look at sex-differentiated age forecasts shows that the predicted life span in industrially developed countries is 4-7 years greater for women than for men (Table 2).

TABLE 2

Age Forecasts (in years)

[See Hun, p. 27]

	WOMEN	MEN	Women's extra years
Sweden	76.5	71.9	4.6
Norway	76.0	71.0	5.0
Denmark	74.7	70.1	4.6
Israel	72.9	69.3	3.6
Japan	74.2	68.9	5.3
Bulgaria	72.7	68.8	3.9
Switzerland	73.7	68.7	5.0
Canada	74.2	68.4	5.8
France	75.4	68.2	7.2
Ireland	71.9	68.1	3.8
Australia	74.2	67.9	6.3
Belgium	73.5	67.7	5.8
Federal Republic of Germany	73.6	67.6	6.0
Spain	71.9	67.3	4.6
Italy	72.3	67.2	5.0
U.S.A.	74.2	67.0	7.2
Hungary	71.0	67.0	4.0

In the developing countries, on the other hand, even in the recent past women's life expectancy was shorter than that of men, presumably owing to the greater exploitation of women. In 1957 in India, for example, life expectancy was 32.4 years for men and only 31.6 for women.

In view of the fact that in the developed countries women marry a few years earlier than men do, and also live longer, it is clear that many more women than men must be living alone. Table 3 illustrates the situation in Hungary, a case in point, where there are approximately three times as many non-married women as non-married men.

TABLE 3

Distribution (%) of Population over 60 in Terms of Marital Status, in Hungary (1960)

SEX	SINGLE	MARRIED	WIDOWED	DIVORCED	TOTAL LIVING ALONE
Male	3.4	78.8	16.4	1.4	21.2
Female	6.4	39.4	52.1	2.1	60.6

Of the age classifications of populations, the best known is the one set up by the World Health Organization (WHO) in 1963, according to which people between ages 40 and 59 are characterized as 'Middle-aged', those between 60 and 74 as 'Elderly', those between 75 and 90 as 'Old', and people over 90 as 'Aged'. The present study will be chiefly concerned with the Elderly, who are also known as Senior Citizens. We will be especially concerned with those senior citizens who are retired. Table 4 surveys the minimum age for retirement benefits in various countries.

TABLE 4

Full Retirement Age in Certain Countries

(1965 figures)

AGE		COUNTRIES
WOMEN	MEN	
50	50	Uruguay
50	55	Argentina, Bolivia
55	55	Ecuador
55	60	Albania, Bulgaria, China, Cuba, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Italy, Japan, Panama, Turkey, USSR, Yugoslavia
57	62	Romania
60	60	Dominican Republic, France, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, Thailand, United Arab Republic

60	65	Australia, Austria, Belgium, Brazil, GDR, Greece, Israel, Poland, South Africa, UK
65	65	Chile, Finland, FR Germany, Mexico, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Switzerland, USA
67	67	Denmark, Iceland, Sweden
70	70	Canada, Iceland, Norway

The increase in the number of the elderly and the old has made it socially necessary to study these groups and has brought into being the science of gerontology. By 1963 there were at least 30,000 gerontological articles in various journals. Over the last 20 years there has also developed, alongside the medical research, a discipline of social gerontology – the study of the social circumstances of that age group. The International Association of Gerontology has set up a separate section for social gerontology. From 1969 on, the International Centre of Social Gerontology has been coordinating research and findings in this field. Specialists feel that we are on the threshold of a large-scale scientific collaboration, the sort of joint effort that served, in the past, to combat the great infectious diseases, tuberculosis and infant mortality. In this connection we may mention Eurag-Isca, a major social organization which grew out of two umbrella organizations: the European Federation for the Welfare of the Elderly (Graz, Austria) and America's International Senior Citizens Association. The goal of Eurag-Isca is to mobilize the still quite active older generation to take part in the effort to solve its own problems.

B. LIVING AND LEARNING

According to Bromley (p. 389), one of the aims of gerontology is to maximize (and maintain at a maximum level) strength and capacities throughout the expected life span.

The research shows unambiguously that superannuation upsets the stability of routine, and this may lead to serious disturbances for those senior citizens who are not able to adjust. Relatively well-known forms of such disturbances include insomnia, depression, suicide attempts and other traumatic responses.

It is a basic psychological principle that, even in the case of animals, inactivity quickens involution (i.e. senile degeneration), while activity slows it down. As Hun (p. 155) puts it: "What happens to a retired person primarily depends on how he keeps himself busy and how much meaning, purpose or satisfaction he finds in this activity". Clearly, the activity can only satisfy

these conditions if it matches the person's abilities and wishes. Old people display certain characteristic transformations of mental ability. Flexibility, for example, is generally weakened. (This is positively or negatively affected by one's core personality, acquired abilities, and environment.) There is an increased tendency towards injury. One begins to find the past more interesting. The senses function less effectively; reactions slow down. Memory, attention and performance are impaired. There is an increase in responsibility, trustworthiness, interest in work, discipline, caution, patience and the ratio of work completed to work undertaken. There are, however, significant individual differences, so that chronological age as such is not decisive: even a very old person may be able to solve a problem that requires innovative thinking.

In connection with abilities, Moers makes the important point that, although adaptability to sustained physical labor decreases as one gets to be older than 50, one's intellectual achievement — despite interruptions and, often, progressive decay of memory — may in fact peak between the ages of 60 and 70. The latter is a result of the use of the nervous system, which has been perfected by life-long maturation processes. Among well-known examples of people who created immortal works of art and science at an advanced age are Sophocles, Plato, Titian, Michelangelo, Galileo, Newton, Jókai, Leeuwenhoek, Verdi, Kodály, and Shaw. Birren maintains that, given appropriate health, hygiene, environment and mental growth stimulation, these still all-too-rare cases might become commonplace. Recent research underscores the effect of the human environment on the abilities and achievements of old people. Labouvie-Vief and others, on the basis of fifty papers on the subject, conclude that there is no support for the hypothesis of explicit retroevolution; on the contrary, intellectual achievement shows significant elasticity, and regression often reflects a lack of favourable conditions in the environment. Ruediger, too, stresses the influence of environmental factors on mental achievement, feeling that this influence is far greater than has usually been assumed. Particularly deleterious on this score is the prejudice, known as 'agism', that leads to discrimination against the elderly on account of their age. This attitude stigmatizes the elderly as physically and mentally useless, brings about an atmosphere hostile to them, and destroys their self-confidence, which they are losing in any case and which they vitally need if they are to remain mentally healthy.

In this connection, we must remember that such mental health is not merely an individual but also a pressing social need. Among other things, it prevents the elderly from being institutionalized. In the interest of the individual and of society, the negative attitude towards the elderly must be altered.

In selecting activities appropriate for old people we are most frequently reminded of the following:

1. The activity should take up the actual span of free time. By 'actual span of free time' we mean here the time each day that one is not using for work or sleep.
2. It should reduce isolation and solitude, which cause serious somatic and psychological problems, by encouraging personal interactions, such as conversation, correspondence, etc.
3. It should give a feeling of usefulness and compensate for the sense of inferiority that results from the retired person's situation.
4. It should lead to self-respect as well as respect from people in the community and in society whom one takes seriously.
5. It should have the potential for increasing income.
6. It should give opportunities for self-fulfilment.
7. It should bring experience of success.
8. It should have an active quality. Radio, television or books cannot substitute for active participation. It should make creativity possible.
9. It should enrich personality and broaden horizons, by making new personal relationships possible, encouraging travel, and so on.
10. It should offer specific goals, clarify aims, impart awareness of forward movement and the possibility of growth.
11. It should give an opportunity for the communication of experiences through lectures, autobiography, teaching.
12. It should help strengthen the likelihood that the individual will leave a trace of his personality in the world.

To spend one's retirement most effectively and for a prolonged period, one should emphasize those powers which are still on the increase or at least suffer no marked diminution, namely the mental powers.

In general there is no problem about the use of free time in the case of those intellectuals who can continue work that they enjoy. Among these people, those who need no special tools or conditions for their activity are in the most favourable situation. The majority of retired persons, however, may need to get interested in a new field and acquire new knowledge.

The first question that we must confront is whether the structure of human capacities permits reeducation, and to what degree. In the case of young people, research on fitness for a profession has shown that the individual has versatile capacities which suit him not for one profession only but for a whole range of professions. One's structure of capacities continues to take shape up to an age that cannot be defined with any precision. These findings are supported by frequently occurring changes of profession and their causes

(which have been statistically measured), namely: a pseudo-inclination not recognized as such early enough, a change of inclination, and ambivalence or uncertainty at the time of the choice of a profession.

Results of research completed so far indicate that every person has unused or undeveloped abilities. Systematic ferreting out of latent abilities (before one retires) on the basis of carefully prepared questions, utilizing even childhood memories, is today mostly a task for research, as is the study of how far it is possible to regenerate intellectual abilities which have decayed through lack of use.

We should also mention the much studied question of preparation for retirement. A particularly important task in this connection is the provision of information and advice on occupations suited to people's abilities and circumstances. This information should take into consideration the need for, and possibility of, continuous, life-long study and (in view of the research findings mentioned above) one should also speak to the people who will constitute the retired person's human environment.

The problem of retired persons' free time is also being discussed in contexts other than gerontology. For example, it was the theme of one of the twelve sections of the Second International Conference on Leisure and Culture (Budapest, 1974). These triennial conferences are organized in Budapest by the Hungarian Society for the Popularization of Natural and Social Sciences (TIT) and are supported by Unesco, in collaboration with the European Centre for Leisure and Education (ECLE), in Prague.

With respect to intellectual skills, manual laborers are obviously at a disadvantage relative to intellectuals. Still, the picture is not quite as depressing as Beauvoir makes it out to be in France, where allegedly the manual laborer is excluded from everything that gives meaning to life except reproduction (p. 568)! In Hungary, for example, over the last thirty years an atmosphere of respect for knowledge and the general accessibility and mass use of self-teaching resources (books, popularizing magazines, courses, radio, television, etc.) has enabled even less educated people to pick up considerable cultural awareness. One may therefore assume that the better part of all of today's 50-to-60-year-old Hungarians already have an adequate cultural basis to undertake an appropriate intellectual activity, even if they were formerly manual workers.

We can now move to a second question. What does existing research have to say about how well older people can learn?

The relevant findings are encouraging. Our experiences concerning animal and human learning show that the ability to learn hardly changes with age. Prior learning plays a far more significant role than age. Certain sorts of

verbal learning are resistant to the normal effect of aging. Practice, which can make up for any other defects, plays an important part. The cases of Socrates and Seneca, who systematically learned at an advanced age – until the end of their lives – are well known. Less illustrious cases are not infrequent either, and we accord them public recognition. A recent press report stated that in the Japanese town of Kakogawa, Hyogo, there is an Old People's College for men and women over 60. The average age of students is 67, and at the time of the press report the college had 2391 students. Likewise, there were recently initiated at the University of Geneva courses for the elderly which were designed to take participants beyond their immediate personal concerns. 840 students (average age: 68) took part.

C. LEARNING LANGUAGES IN LATER LIFE

In the present study we are particularly concerned, among the available subjects of study, with language learning. Who is a suitable language student? Kozeki emphasizes that everybody who was able to learn his own language satisfactorily can also master a foreign language, given enough time and appropriate opportunities. The meaning of 'enough' and 'appropriate' can vary enormously depending on the individual. In order to be a successful language learner one must have at least average intelligence. Motivation is decisive. The most effective stimulus is progress – positive experience in achieving linguistic mastery. The teacher must work out a satisfactory methodology and take the learner's age into consideration. Kozeki cites Carroll's conclusion, based on many experiments of his own, that there is no evidence that language learning ability decreases in the course of a person's life. There is also no significant difference between men and women with respect to the relevant abilities.

Nevertheless several researchers have found that the skills necessary for language learning do decrease at an advanced age. The results of Drietomszky's work show that there is a significant correlation between age and loss of capacity to internalize heteronymous pairs of words. But this does not mean that the elderly are less capable of learning words than other people. Talland has found that if the elderly are given enough time and opportunity, retentivity does not change with advanced age, for the old person can use his experiences and tactical abilities to reach the same goal. He also stresses that, naturally, there is not always perfect agreement between laboratory results and experience derived from life. Eisdorfer reports that anxiety has a detrimental effect on the subjects of experiments, so one may assume that reduction of anxiety would lead to better performance than is observed under

laboratory test conditions. Similarly the inhibiting effect of competition with younger people has frequently been pointed out. Thus it is reasonable to assume that groups consisting exclusively of retired persons would show better results than do mixed groups, although one may not entirely exclude the possibility that in certain cases such artificial isolation would have a negative influence on the expected result.

In support of the above assumption, one may cite the fact that the German language courses organized for retired people by the Hungarian newspaper *Magyar Hirlap* enjoyed considerable success. This was reported by Hungarian Television (Programme for the Retired), which suggested that in view of the interest shown, several such courses should be set up, involving additional languages.

The next step is to choose an appropriate foreign language. For people who have relatives or acquaintances abroad and can visit them or correspond with them, the choice is easy. It is also easy for those people who want to revive their previous knowledge of a language or who have long wanted to study a particular language and to read its literature in the original. At most they have to worry about the fact that enjoying high-quality literature requires a thorough knowledge of the language. Acquiring such a knowledge necessitates great will-power and an extraordinary sense of how the language works.

In the absence of explicit motives for a specific ethnic language, we recommend that the older person learn the international language Esperanto, which is itself one of the most significant creations of human intelligence, and which has certain major advantages for older people.

D. WHY ESPERANTO?

The advantages of Esperanto relative to ethnic languages are considerable. First, the agreement between pronunciation and spelling and the logical, simple grammatical structure make Esperanto by far the easiest of the world's spoken languages to learn. Hence learning it brings a rapid return on investment and gives a sense of achievement.

Second, from each word root, some six or eight new words can be formed by following the rules of word formation. This makes it possible to cope with everyday conversation and its varied needs with as little as five or six hundred roots. Furthermore, the fact that one can actually *form* words in Esperanto helps satisfy the creative element in language-learning.

Third, Esperanto is in many respects a kind of basic Indo-European language, in which there are numerous international words derived from Latin. The quality of its vocabulary makes a deeper understanding of such international words possible. Not only the words but also the entire structure facilitates association with other Indo-European languages and evocation of their perhaps long-forgotten points of grammar. This quality helps broaden the linguistic perspective of the learner, arguments general sophistication and becomes a great source of pleasure. The many works of literature existing in Esperanto, including translations, offer much opportunity for further reading and reinforce an ongoing sense of discovery.

Fourth, after only a few months of study one is able to make spoken or written contact with speakers of Esperanto, people from all over the world. This is an immensely satisfying experience, especially for those people who have suffered because of linguistic isolation, for example working people who have had little contact with foreigners. The experience also enriches people whose hobby is collecting stamps, picture postcards, records and so on; they constitute a relatively large proportion of retired persons.

Fifth, group learning is itself a good way of fighting loneliness and its attendant problems. Such group learning is common in the Esperanto movement, and it is supplemented by extensive programs of meetings and other events. New human relationships and friendships grow out of this experience. Since the language is relatively easy, it is also a suitable subject for people who are bedridden and unable to take part in meetings. In such cases the experience may accelerate convalescence and related individual and social interests.

Sixth, Esperanto serves universal human interests and may increase the possibilities for peace and mutual understanding among peoples. Taking part in this effort, in and of itself, can give meaning and purpose to the late phase of a human life.

If one were to set up Esperanto courses for elderly people only, in cooperation with psychologists or gerontologists, the latter would on the one hand have an opportunity to find out directly about the favourable effects of Esperanto learning on retired persons and on the other hand could help shape optimal pedagogical techniques for older students (see below).

What, then, can the Esperanto movement do for older people? It can provide them with a noble goal, with intellectual activity, with a sense of achievement, with new human relationships. It can contribute to mental and physical well-being. Simultaneously, it can serve the interests of human society in an important field. Veteran Esperantists, after they reach retirement age, continue to have a firm grasp of these values. Consequently, re-

tirement gives them less cause for anxiety, so that traumatic responses disappear or at least are reduced in intensity.

E. WHAT CAN THE ELDERLY DO FOR THE ESPERANTO MOVEMENT?

If the only relationship between the Esperanto movement and the elderly were that such a relationship contributes to the solution of an increasingly urgent problem of mankind, the Esperanto movement surely would not deny the help required. Yet one may ask whether the traffic only goes one way or whether the elderly can actually give the movement values which will speed up the attainment of its goals.

In broad terms, we may say that older people are always useful when they are able to use their positive capacities (experience, wisdom, reliability, persistence, etc.) and when their negative qualities (slackening of work pace, decay of the senses, reduction of physical strength, etc.) do not constitute a serious handicap.

Studies of the competence of older people support the frequent supposition that they are competent administrators. They are good as members of commissions, or as magistrates, or in various types of social management, for in those areas their experience is often of much more value than even quite acute intelligence possessed by younger people. Leadership abilities peak in the age range from 50 to 70. This period is also characterized by the writing and publication of historical works, monographs, textbooks, and so on. It is the period of the fullest development of the ability to synthesize, and tends to be an age at which people revise older works and complete large projects initiated earlier in life.

In the Esperanto movement, such abilities can be put to relatively complete use. Many elderly people are active in responsible positions in the Esperanto movement and many outstanding individuals have devoted most of their energy, in some form or other, to the Esperanto movement in their old age.

But what of the 'simple' older members of our ranks. Do they, too, add value to the movement, and if so, what sort of value?

Rather more of them (since they have more free time) take part in the life of the movement: group meetings, special events, the arts. They willingly undertake ad hoc tasks, for example in the Volunteer Service of the Universal Esperanto Association (UEA). They bring about a favourable attitude towards Esperanto among friends and relatives. Often they come to exert con-

siderable influence on their grandchildren whose own (working) parents have less contact with them. This effect is not negligible, for it has been noticed that many people who learn Esperanto do so partly under the influence of some Esperantist in the family.

The fact that Esperanto goes well also with the mental structure of the elderly and the aged can serve as an additional argument in favour of its universal application.

Successful Esperanto courses for retired people arranged in cooperation with gerontologists, psychologists, and so on, would, if they were scientifically documented, help to increase interest in the therapeutic value of Esperanto among such specialists and hence indirectly strengthen the Esperanto movement. Considering the prestige of international gerontological organizations, this would be a significant result.

In view of the fact that the number of elderly persons is growing throughout the world, and hence in the Esperanto movement as well, it would be appropriate to establish a separate organization, following the format of other international organizations, to which every Esperantist over sixty would automatically belong, just as members of UEA under twenty-five automatically belong to the World Esperanto Youth Organization (TEJO).

Within such an organization, the elderly would be able to deal with their own special problems as well as with the problems of the Esperanto movement, to offer assistance when needed, and to take part in courses. Naturally this would not detract from their continued participation in the life of local groups and in other unrestricted events. This sort of organization would be able to contribute to the solution of conflict situations which sometimes arise when the old and the young attempt to work together. The organization of older people could establish relations with Eurag-Isca (see above) and other specialized organizations. To try out the idea, one could start groups within the present national Esperanto associations, for retired persons who wish to belong to the movement.

F. ORGANIZING COURSES FOR OLDER PEOPLE

We have mentioned research findings to the effect that age does not significantly affect language acquisition, and we have reported some successful language courses for retired people.

Experience with the teaching of Esperanto shows that many of the people who attend adult courses nowadays are elderly people.

It is conceivable that in the future, apart from students who want to study alone anyway, many elderly people will wish to begin their learning process in traditional classes, for they are happy and feel refreshed to be in touch with young people. This option naturally must remain available to them. But, for reasons already discussed, it seems useful to organize experimental courses specifically for retired people. Teaching methods in such courses would be based on consideration of age characteristics, and there would be assistance from gerontologists and psychologists. One might expect greater mutual benefit here than in 'mixed' courses.

Such courses could be organized wherever mentally flexible older people still in relatively good health had usable free time, preferably immediately after retirement. In Hungary, a well developed system of social security and cultural policy makes for especially favourable conditions, and our linguistic isolation would be a strong argument for setting up such courses. But they would certainly be fruitful in other countries too. Such language courses would also help to preserve the life experience of the present older generation, a group who have suffered a great deal in recent history. It is in everybody's interest that these experiences not be forgotten, that they be preserved and shared so that they can serve the cause of peace and understanding among peoples of all parts of the world.

A precondition of success is a careful choice of teachers. Such teachers must want success, either because they themselves are elderly or for other reasons; they must be willing and able to experiment; they must be willing to cooperate with other specialists, such as psychologists and gerontologists.

It is important that these conditions be met, for if the first scientific articles and reports are not well-founded, experiments will cease, and the advantages of Esperanto teaching among the elderly will not be recognized. (It is of course well known that it is much harder to reinitiate an experiment that failed than to launch a new one.)

G. THE TEXTBOOK

For the purpose of language study, a textbook is absolutely essential, and the direct method must not be used exclusively, since the elderly are more often sick than others and so apt to miss class sessions. If the direct method were used, they would be unable to make up for the lessons missed and soon give up. For the same reason it is essential that the textbook be suitable for self-study as well as course study, that it be bilingual, and that it contain a vocabulary, grammatical explanations in the national language, exercises and

other texts meant to be translated in both directions and a key for homework (as in the Hungarian textbook of Baghy). In addition, the textbook should make use of modern structuralist ideas and psychological observations, where relevant.

Textbooks explicitly written for elderly people probably do not yet exist, even in other languages. This does not of course mean that such books are unnecessary, just that social gerontology, as a relatively new branch of science, has yet to exert its full influence on language teaching.

Psychological research findings available so far do suggest a few ideas for such a textbook. First, the preface should encourage daily, lifelong mental gymnastic effort of the sort needed in order to preserve mental and physical health. It should get the reader interested in Esperanto by outlining its advantages, including those that pertain to the older generation. It should impart self-confidence and it should stress that everybody can learn this relatively easy language, given enough effort; it is only the amount of work put in that varies from person to person. It should underscore the fact that abilities are subject to vast individual variation, especially as far as older people are concerned, and that therefore there is no reason for the learner to be ashamed because he or she needs more time or tries harder than other learners to achieve the same result.

Second, the whole textbook should underscore respect for the elderly. The protagonists should be representatives of that age group. An example might be a recently retired couple in which the man still works in his field of interest as a retired person, while the woman helps raise her grandchildren. They use their free time to learn Esperanto. They travel, correspond, collect picture postcards or stamps, and so on. The first part of the book might deal with the everyday life of such a couple and the second part with how they make friends with older Esperantists from all over the world.

Third, the basic vocabulary should be set up in accordance with the findings of statistical studies, which suggest a total of 1300–1400 root words for normal use. In addition to the usual topics, it would be useful to include in the very first part vocabulary dealing with health and correspondence (including, say, models of letters and addresses), so the student can put his new knowledge to immediate use. The readings should be interesting and the book should contain as many easily memorable sentences as possible, especially proverbs.

H. TEACHING METHODS

Psycholinguistic findings suggest that in the teaching of grammar one should aim for positive transfers attained through goal-oriented instruction. In view of the fact that the internalization of the grammar of a second language always takes place through the grammatical system of the first language, it is extremely important that the student have a firm grasp of first-language grammar. But my experiences of various sorts of teaching in different languages show that in many people's minds the basic notions of grammar either never quite emerged (even if they have learned several foreign languages) or have been forgotten so thoroughly that they are not a reliable basis for the teaching of the target language.

Hence it seems that, at the very beginning of study, when he first encounters a particular grammatical point, the student should receive an explanation of that point itself as well as points related to it. In the framework of a conversation (of at most one hour) the teacher should, in addition to explaining the usefulness of the conversational technique, recapitulate the most important notions about word classes and sentence constituents, and this should be reinforced by a few parsing exercises. The students should either put down in their notebooks or be given a short written survey of the subject. Such repetition will certainly be of use to the elderly, in view of the long time they have been out of school and the extremely heterogeneous nature of such groups.

Likewise, at the very start it is worthwhile to give some advice to students about the question of how one can learn most effectively. The increased reaction times show up, research shows, even in the learning process. On the one hand there is a decrease in the speed of the processing of input by the central nervous sytem. In other words, more time is needed for the response to come through, as there is an increase in the duration of the latent period of a motor reflex arc. On the other hand, it takes longer for an older person to recall knowledge which has been recently deposited in his memory storage.

The slower perception, the impaired memory, the greater magnitude of nonretention presumably call for slower teaching and more frequent repetition. It is impossible to predict quite how great the effect of these factors is, that is, how many words and how large a text one can study, on the average, during a 45-minute lesson, relative to, say, the figure of fifteen new elements and fifteen lines of text proposed in the 'golden mean' method. Only on the basis of several experimental courses whose results have been statistically processed can we begin to answer such questions.

In exercises, it is good to bear in mind that saying words out loud serves to concentrate intellectual processes and perception. For this reason, frequent repetition in unison seems advantageous.

One of the principal conditions for successful study is the setting up of rational interrelations. Here is one version of several experiments relevant to this point. After one reading of word pairs, one group of participants remembered only 8%. Another group, whose members had had pointed out to them some relationship between the paired words, remembered 39%. A few days later those who had learned by rote had forgotten almost everything, while members of the other group could still recall 50 to 60% of what they had learned.

One can exploit the superiority of logic-bound memory over rote learning by bringing back every bit of knowledge already available and by relating everything that one reads to things already known, thus inserting the new learning into a specific area of one's already structured network of familiarities.

There is no doubt that by the time one is old one has accumulated many bits of information, which by then have also crystallized into a rather coherent whole. The deliberate exploitation of this fact can be advantageous. Evocation of old knowledge and the establishment of associations may be worth trying even if the students have partly forgotten the old facts. For forgetting does not necessarily imply the annihilation of the engram (memory trace).

In this connection it is useful to remind students of international words as a source for Esperanto words that they are trying to learn. This helps both those who know the relevant word or even use it in their own first-language conversation and those who often come across it in magazines, books, radio broadcasts and so on without quite knowing what it means. This is particularly beneficial for the latter sort of students, as a broadening of their mental horizons.

With words taken from a single ethnic language one has to exercise more caution. Reference to the original form appears to be of use only if all students know or once knew the language concerned; otherwise there is the danger of giving the less well-educated students a sense of inferiority. And in any case, it is enough to refer to source language in a quite non-specific way.

As is well known, various mnemonic tricks help people to remember words. It is useful for the teacher to collect them, with the help of the students.

Recent experiments pertaining to the development of language ability show that most of the obstacles to nexus formation can be eliminated if ready-made structures are taught. In this fashion the structures are syn-

chronously accepted by the memory. From this viewpoint it may be most useful to teach proverbs. Several textbooks (for example Setäla's *Privilegia Vojo*) make abundant use of them in teaching points of grammar, especially suffixes. For elderly students proverbs have a double value: as grammatical structures and as concentrated forms of frequently experienced truths.

Checking (feedback from student output) is necessary for all age groups. A recent experiment shows that both in a group of young people (54 people, average age 20) and in a group of old people (54 people, average age 75) all students made less mistakes if the teachers greeted right answers with 'Right' and did not respond to wrong answers.

Encouragement and assistance in home reading, organized correspondence and special extracurricular meetings certainly contribute to perceptible progress also among older people.

I. PUTTING ESPERANTO TO GOOD USE

When the students are through with the beginners' course, have studied the textbook, know a basic stock of words and grammatical structures, and perhaps wish to take an elementary examination (the results of which may add to their self-confidence and thus enable them to face the future more adequately), the teacher should speak to every student individually about his plans for continuing and advise him on options.

Elderly people have various kinds of means at their disposal to continue their activity as Esperantists. Many of them (perhaps most of them) primarily wish to speak with fluency, to practise above all the words and expressions they have already picked up, and to render their use automatic so that they can speak to others without making mistakes. The course has taught all of them how to write letters, and all that they need in order to write more or less correct letters is patience and a dictionary. But they cannot converse yet, for they have not had enough opportunity to do so. It is true that one can learn Esperanto conversation by speaking to friends who know the language, but very few have access to such company. So it would seem useful to set up small groups, of at most five members each (for example in retired people's clubs), for conversation only.

Second, there will be many who want not only to speak fluently but also to improve their knowledge of all modes of language use, without taking special examinations. They may take part in conventional second-level courses (where people from different age groups study together) and study convenient textbooks.

Third, some individuals will wish to continue study, take examinations, and obtain a certificate. They will turn to the syllabi for advanced examinations.

Finally we must emphasize again that the above thoughts on the teaching of older people are of course hypotheses only, to be supported, refuted or completed by practical experience.

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